

POLL PREPARED? TAKE THE TEST

1 "Covering the election is the concern of political reporters only."
(a) True (go to 10)
(b) False (go to 15)

2 Boffins tell us the media operate on people's knowledge levels, attitudes and behaviour - roughly in that order. So it's a very long shot for coverage to lead to a certain kind of voting behaviour. But that said, the media can set agendas - as to what people think are main issues to argue about and act upon. That includes an agenda about whether the election is actually important enough to go and vote in. Go to 13.

3 The elections are about:
(a) seeing who hangs on aboard the gravy train, aka which new hogs will get their snouts into the trough. (Go to 11)
(b) a genuine chance to renew government for, by and of the people. (Go to 11)

14 Elections have got it all: drama, conflict, contests, people, pictures. Key things to watch for: will Inkatha hold KwaZulu-Natal?; can the ANC keep Gauteng?; who will be the official opposition? Which ANC politicians are staking their claim to future greatness? Will Bantu Holomisa's UDM make any impact? Be warned, though: don't only focus on the serious big news - check out number 9 before you continue.

15 Right, citizen: politics is about the personal and everything else too. Need more convincing? Take a turn to question 20.

16 Transcribe your answers to your diary now, entering them on 1 April. And don't forget to check back when you get the real thing. If you're close, consider a change in career. Goodbye journalism, g'day Gallup. Now, sign off at Number 21.

4 The key election issues are crime and jobs. If the ANC trumpets its recent laws that hit hard at batterers and help rural women inherit property, it could win extra female support. Leap ahead to 6.

13 Only 10% of young people registered to vote last year.
(a) "So what?" (Go to 18)
(b) "That's something of a crisis" (Go to 5)

21 Qs & As TO GET YOU IN GEAR TO COVER THE ELECTION

BY GUY BERGER

5 The election will survive without youth participation. But what about democracy? What stake will younger people hold? This is serious. Go to 12.

12 Wow - a million more women than men registered as voters last year. How is that going to impact on the vote? Point 4 gives the answer.

21 You're roadworthy. Consider yourself a finely-tuned, fully-briefed, fast-shooting democratic functionary. Get out there and get stuck into the biggest story of 1999. Enjoy.

17 You guessed it: it's all these roles. And some people think journalism is easy! Go to question 7.

6 A journalist covering the election should mainly:
(a) play a watchdog role and aim to expose political intolerance, vote-rigging, blandishments and politico blather.
(b) be an educator, explaining the hows, whys and wherefores of voting.
(c) concentrate on fair play for all political parties, so the voters can make informed choices at the ballot box.
(d) provide a platform for grassroots concerns so the politicians have to respond to the people's agenda. Visit Number 17 for the correct answer.

11 the elections are a bit of both. Don't be one-sidedly cynical, nor naively idealistic. Scepticism - yes; hope - yes. That's a healthy journalistic pose. But also remember the main thing: that the elections are about lots more than who sits in the next parliament or provincial legislature. The poll will set the political agenda for a long time to come. It can fan expectations and fix lines of division. It can also feed a culture of political tolerance and foster accountability. Watch the process, not just the event. Jump across to question 19.

20 I agree with (a) or (b):
a. "The election story is entirely predictable. Boring, boring, boring." Go to 9.
b. "I can hear and smell the sizzle in the story." Go to 14.

19 "The media have immense power to influence the election".
(a) True (go to 8)
(b) False (go to 2)

18 You're right. And who can blame them when most politics and media neglect youth news and views? Still, this thing does need watching. Go to 12.

7 What percentage of the vote will the following parties get?:
DP
NNP
ANC
IFP
Write your answer above and mosey off to 16.

10 Take those blinkers off! Go to 15

9 The main reporting challenge is to find fresh angles in the mundane. Why not get the parties' points of view on Viagra? Get a group of kids to interview Sibusiso Bengu. Canvass around for poll-ish jokes (or create some yourself). Now, off to 3.

8 Don't exaggerate too much. The pro-DP orientation of most newspapers last time round sure didn't translate into votes. Go to 2.